

This past Monday morning a man named Lloyd Jeffress drove from his home in Kearney, Missouri, to Conception Abbey. He walked into the church and then into the monastery where he shot and killed Brother Damian in the hallway. Then he shot and wounded Father Kenneth and Father Norbert in the coffee room. He also shot and killed Father Philip, the 85-year old monk who usually greeted visitors to the abbey. The killer then returned to the basilica and shot and killed himself. No one knows why this 71-year old man committed these crimes.

On Thursday morning the American Catholic bishops began their meeting in Dallas, Texas, where they later voted on a nationwide policy concerning sexual abuse by priests. The number of these cases is alarmingly high, and no one knows why.

Evil has afflicted the Catholic Church from without and from within. In the past God has helped us overcome our crises. We believe the Holy Spirit will guide us through these difficult days.

When Jesus sent out his disciples, he let them share his extraordinary powers. They drove out unclean spirits and cured illnesses. They worked marvels that our church still needs today. Jesus also told the disciples what not to do. Their mission was not to the pagans or Samaritans, but only to Israel. "Let's take care of our own people first," Jesus said.

The American bishops and the monks of Conception Abbey are trying to do just that. The bishops are trying to restore the confidence of American Catholics in their leadership. The monks are trying to provide a place where people can grow closer to God. The irony of the attack on the monastery is that if the man who committed these crimes was troubled about God and the Church, he could have found help at Conception Abbey.

Our church family is no different from any human family. A good family wants to grow strong in love and friendship, to live in a peaceful home and to serve the broader community. Sometimes things happen to families that just aren't fair: Someone commits a crime. Someone suffers an addiction. Someone dies while they are still young. And sometimes more than one of these things happens to a family at the same time, making the members feel troubled and abandoned.

The crowds who heard Jesus moved him with pity. Matthew says they were troubled and abandoned like sheep without a shepherd. We can count on this, that Christ will provide the guidance we need in our families and in our church. In Dallas, the bishops have written a document, and at Conception the monks have offered forgiveness. Both efforts apply a tonic to hurts that need healing. God knows the illnesses that afflict us. And God will help us care for our own house.